

Editorial

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Mr. Casey's shady past

IF WILLIAM J. CASEY really is clean as a hound's tooth, it is only in that dog-eat-dog world of corporate predators where negotiated settlements are the magic wand that expunges records of wrongdoing with a simple wave.

Mr. Casey is the strangely cast director of the Central Intelligence Agency, a role for which he qualified by running Ronald Reagan's successful 1980 campaign for the presidency. The fact that he served Mr. Reagan well then is not sufficient grounds for believing that he is serving the nation well now. Enough of Mr. Casey's checkered past is still on record to support the idea that what he serves best are the interests of William J. Casey.

Last week, those interests required the sacrifice of a friend, Max Hugel, who was chief of clandestine operations in the CIA. Mr. Hugel had conversations with his friend and boss and then resigned because of charges, which he denied, that he had engaged in improper stock market practices. Mr. Hugel must find it painfully ironic that he should be gone so quickly on the basis of a molehill charge while Mr. Casey, whose alleged improprieties are mountainous by comparison, enjoys the entrenched support of the White House.

Mr. Casey's past admittedly reveals one possible qualification for his position as head of the nation's intelligence organization. He is no stranger to clandestine operations, nor to the sleight-of-hand with which incriminating records and documents can be made to disappear right before the eyes of federal investigators and congressional committees.

The case against Mr. Casey is persuasive. He has settled for \$8,000 out of court a lawsuit accusing him of securities violations. He settled for \$200,000 out of court a perjury conviction with the understanding that the perjury would be erased from the public record. Another suit, charging him with misleading investors, has never been settled. He thwarted congressional

efforts to investigate his role as chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission by turning possibly incriminating records over to the Justice Department.

Serious allegations of financial misrepresentation, securities violations, concealed conflicts of interest and unethical behavior as a lawyer are dismissed by Mr. Casey's defenders as unimportant. They would have us believe that such are common and ethical practices in the competitive world of financial wheeler-dealers in which Mr. Casey made his fortune.

It is not unimportant that a man with such a past now holds a position in which he is privy to the most sensitive and potentially valuable commercial intelligence. It is outrageous. Even more outrageous is the fact that Mr. Casey's unsuitability for the CIA directorship seems only now to be in jeopardy because of his friendship and business associations with Carl Biehl, a man identified by the Justice Department as an associate of underworld figures in waterfront industries.

We certainly agree that anyone shown to have even indirect associations with underworld figures is unacceptable for a high government position of trust. It is evident, however, that there was sufficient damning evidence of Mr. Casey's personal activities to disqualify him for the responsibility to which President Reagan routinely appointed him.

More damning, however, is the nonfeasance of the Senate in this case. Mr. Casey was an important figure in the Reagan campaign, for which his reward was appointment as director of the CIA. The Senate, in turn, conducted only perfunctory hearings before confirming his appointment. He was, after all, the president's choice. It is clear that Mr. Reagan made an ill-informed choice and placed in a position of particular sensitivity a man who should not have been there for the past five months and who certainly should remain there no longer.